



*The*  
**Chinese Imperial  
Gold Collection**

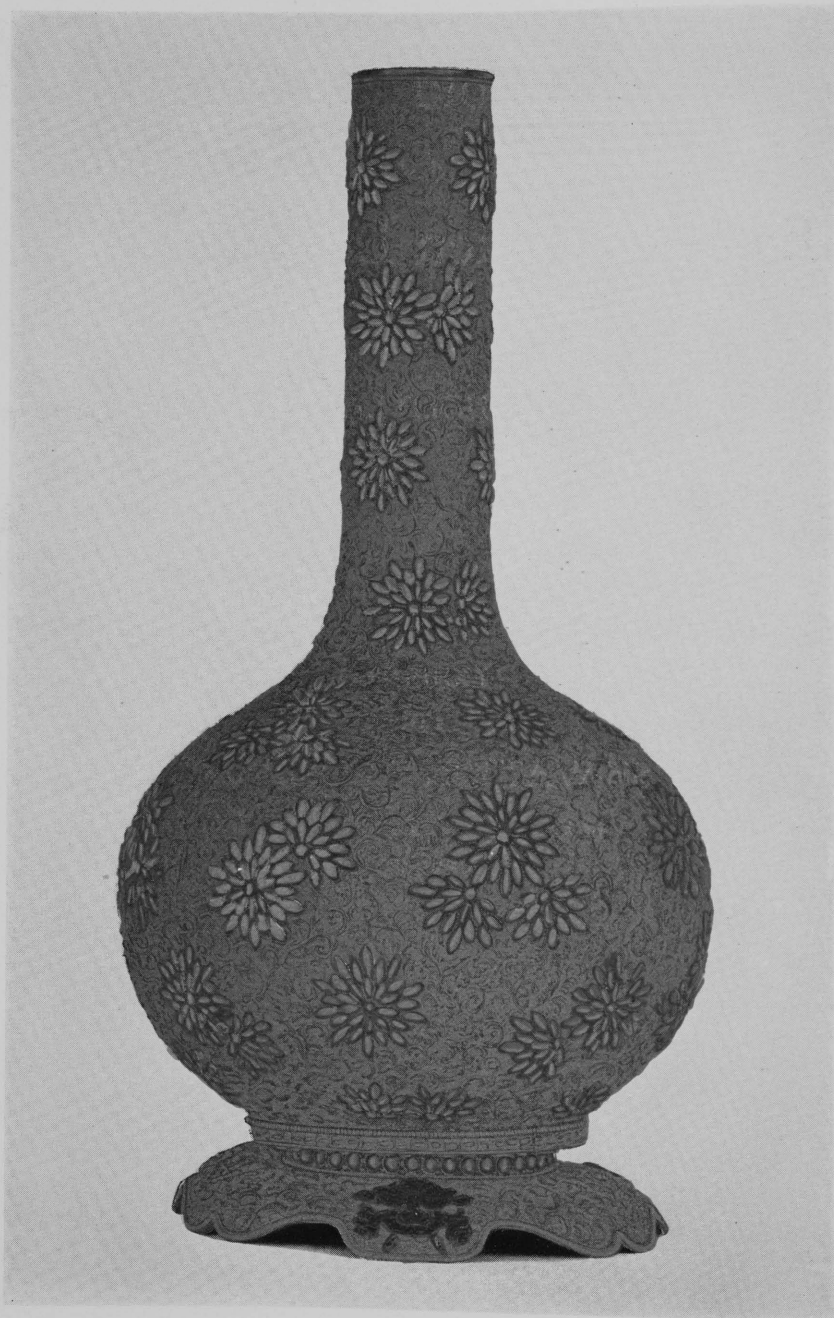
*by*  
**BERTHOLD LAUFER**

*Exhibited by*  
**Parish-Watson & Company, Inc.**  
**New York**









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The Gold Treasure  
*of the*  
Emperor Chien Lung of China

by  
BERTHOLD LAUFER

EXHIBITED  
by  
PARISH-WATSON & COMPANY, INC.  
44 EAST FIFTY-SEVENTH STREET  
NEW YORK

A CENTURY OF PROGRESS  
CHICAGO 1934

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NEW YORK  
1934



## PREFACE

**I**T may be recalled by many of my friends that I have been interested and intimately associated with the Chinese Imperial Gold Collection since its arrival in America some years ago. It was brought to New York where it has remained up to this time. Meanwhile, the House of Parish-Watson Co., Inc., with whom I am now associated, has taken over the collection.

In order to make the collection accessible to a larger public, Mr. Parish-Watson recently consented to its exhibition at Chicago's Century of Progress. Mr. Parish-Watson, broad-minded and public-spirited as he is, has spared no expense in making the exhibition of the collection as attractive and efficient as possible, and furthermore, has honored me by placing me in charge of the arrangement and direction of its public showing.

The obstacles to overcome have been many. It was essential that the safeguarding of the collection be assured; suitable safety devices consequently had to be set up; effective installation was imperative. This, of course, necessitated considerable experimentation with lighting, spacing, background, and numerous other details which would be of no interest to the reader.

Mr. Rufus Dawes, President of A Century of Progress, fully approved our enterprise with enthusiasm, and met all our requirements in a spirit of helpful sympathy and co-operation. I wish herewith to express my thanks to him, his associates, and in fact all other officials of the Fair for the assistance kindly rendered and for the many and various courtesies extended to me.

We believe to perform an act of public duty and an educational mission by showing at A Century of Progress this magnificent gold treasure, which is certainly unique in this world. It is our fervent hope that it will serve to interest the general public in the glory of the ancient civilization of China, and to further the understanding and appreciation of its great art.

It affords me considerable pleasure to lay before the interested public an account of this collection written by Dr. Laufer as a result of a long and profound study. It consists of two parts, an historical introduction and a complete descriptive catalog of the objects, which, in turn, gives much information on the significance and symbolism of the designs.

In conclusion, I wish to proffer my most profound thanks to Dr. Berthold Laufer, indisputably America's foremost sinologist, for his kindly co-operation and his consenting to write the text of this catalog. His spontaneous enthusiasm has acted as a positive inspiration to me and has helped me over the many problems with which I was confronted.

HERBERT J. DEVINE

Chicago, June the first, 1934



## HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION

**I**N A. D. 1783 the great Emperor Chien Lung, who ruled over China from 1736 to 1795, and who was a contemporary of George Washington and a character not unlike Frederick the Great, was made the recipient of a set of gold objects consisting of altogether eighteen articles designed for use on the imperial desk. This presentation was made by a Manchu official of high rank, named Pao Tai, imperial envoy to Tibet. This fact is clearly indicated on the white silk labels pasted in every box, which was especially made for each gold object. The interesting point is that the inscriptions on these labels are not merely written in Chinese, but in the four principal languages which at that time dominated in the empire of China—Chinese, Manchu, Mongol, and Tibetan. The Emperor himself had studied these four languages and mastered them to such a degree that not only could he fluently express himself in each of them, but also was able to write essays in all of them in excellent style. Under his patronage a comparative dictionary of these four languages was published—a work which is still used by us as an indispensable and fundamental source-book.

The labels in question are inscribed in a beautiful calligraphic style. Each inscription contains the identical data pertaining to the dedication of the set and gives the name of Pao Tai, the exact date of the presentation, and the name for the particular object. The official term used in making this gift signifies "a gift of supreme importance and value," including the notion that a man has invested in it his entire fortune, that he has put his heart and soul in it with reverence and devotion and is intent on serving his sovereign to the bitter end.

Each of the eighteen objects intended for use or decoration on the imperial desk is wrought from pure gold, the total weight of which amounts to 5,966 grams (gold and silver were always used unalloyed in China), and is inlaid with beautifully carved and

polished plaques of turquoise and lapis lazuli. Now, both turquoise and lapis lazuli are the favorite precious stones of the Tibetans and Mongols and represent an allusion to the great colonial possessions of the empire in Central Asia. Tibet has likewise been celebrated since times immemorial for its wealth of gold. The famous tradition of the Gold-digging Ants related by Herodotus and the Indian epic Mahābhārata, as shown by me in an article written in 1908, refers to gold-digging Tibetan and Mongol tribes in the region of the upper Yellow River valley. The felicitous and artistic combination of gold with turquoise and lapis lazuli is an intentional and distinct allusion to Tibet. In this connection it is noteworthy that the Chinese imperial envoy sent from Peking to Lhasa, the holy capital of Tibet, was styled in Tibetan "the gold-letter bearer" (*gser-yig-pa*). In the same manner as the Chinese speak of the sovereign's dragon face, the Tibetans refer to it as "the royal golden face" and call the emperor "the golden king" and Peking "the golden castle."

In 1725 the Chinese Government appointed two High Commissioners to control the political affairs of Tibet. Several attempts at revolt in 1750 led to the entire suppression of the temporal sovereignty in Tibet, and the government of the country was placed thenceforward in the hands of the two eminent spiritual rulers, the Dalai Lama of Lhasa and the Panchen Lama of Tashilhunpo, who were aided by a council of four laymen, called Ministers of State, under the direction in chief of the two Imperial Commissioners or Residents appointed from Peking. In consequence of the British advance in India the possession of Tibet was jealously guarded by the Chinese, and the Emperor Chien Lung did everything to attract and to please the high and powerful dignitaries of the Lamaist Church, who on their part controlled the masses of the population, not only in Tibet, but also in Mongolia. The Emperor was deeply interested in Buddhism and Buddhistic teachings, but it was rather political motives that prompted him to promote and to maintain sumptuous Lama tem-



ples in his capital and in his summer residence Jehol, since in this manner he remained in direct personal contact with the Living Buddhas and Incarnations.

In 1793 the Emperor, as though he desired to reciprocate, transmitted to Lhasa a golden urn to be used in selecting the new incarnations. When a Living Buddha is about to die, that is, to transmigrate or to change his form of existence, he tells beforehand of the place where he will reappear, while at his birth he can without difficulty recite the events of his former existence. Little slips of wood, each bearing the name of one of the candidates, were thrown into the golden urn sent by the Emperor Chien Lung, which was then placed in the principal temple of Lhasa in front of the statue of Tsongkhapa, the reformer of Lamaism. A slip was then drawn from the urn, and the child whose name was inscribed on it was declared the new Living Buddha—subject to the Emperor's approval. It is thus manifest that the Chinese, while outwardly respecting Tibetan beliefs and customs, exercised unrestricted control of the political machinery and had a direct influence over the election of the high ecclesiastic dignitaries, including the Dalai Lama and the Panchen Lama. This is the historical background from which the presentation of this group of gold objects is set off. No doubt there was a hidden significant political intention behind this gift, the full import of which escapes our knowledge, but it is obvious that it was intended as a greeting from Tibet to the dragon throne of Peking, as a homage to the emperor of China in his function as the invisible ruler and real protector of Tibet.

In ancient times turquoise was not much appreciated by the Chinese. Among archaic bronze vessels and bronze implements found in southern Mongolia (wrongly labeled Scythian art) there are some with turquoise inlays. Turquoise was a stone which enjoyed popularity among the nomadic tribes of ancient Turkish and Iranian stock living in central Asia. Persia has always been famed for its beautiful turquoises mined at Nishapur, which be-

came known in China during the fourteenth century in the Mongol period. I believe that the turquoise employed in our gold set comes from the mines of Nishapur and was especially ordered there for the imperial treasure. The turquoises mined in Hupeh Province, China, are not of superior quality. Under the Tang dynasty (A. D. 618-906) we find Chinese gold and jade ornaments inlaid with plaques or beads of turquoise.

Tibet, however, has always been the classical land of turquoise. In Tibet a general national passion for this stone prevails among all classes of people, high and low, as the result of a centuries or millenniums old training. What jade is to the Chinese turquoise is to the Tibetans. Turquoise is used in the copper and bronze statues of the gods, in swords, daggers, and knives, in charm boxes, rosaries, and jewelry, and in the head-dresses of women. There is hardly any object used in Tibet, into which turquoises would not enter in some fashion. Turquoise is the great medium of exchange throughout Tibet. Numerous articles now on exhibition in Field Museum were acquired by me from Tibetans through barter with turquoises. To the Tibetans a turquoise is a symbol of their country comparable to the azure-blue of their beautiful lakes and flowers. As we speak of the blue of the sky, the Tibetans say poetically "the turquoise of heaven." In a Tibetan poem the Himalaya is described thus: "This mountain range spreading like a thousand lotuses is white and like rock-crystal during the three winter months; during the three months of summer it is azure-blue like turquoise; during the three autumnal months it is yellow like gold, and in the vernal moons, striped like the skin of a tiger. This chain of mountains, excellent in color and form and of perfect harmony, is inexhaustible in auspicious omens." This passage reveals the innate nature love of the Tibetan people and the parallel which they like to draw between the colors of their favorite gems and those of their natural surroundings in the course of the seasons. In another poem it is said, "On the plain where diamond rocks glitter is a lake with a mirror like turquoise and gold."



Gold and turquois belonged to the most ancient offerings made to gods and demons, and ranked among the most precious gifts bestowed on saints and Lamas by kings and wealthy laymen. The thrones occupied by kings and church dignitaries were adorned with gold and turquoises, which likewise ornamented the cloaks worn by them. Unusually fine and large turquoises were known under poetical names such as "the resplendent, divine turquois" and had the value of a good race-horse. Marco Polo, speaking of the province of Caidu, which is identical with the western part of Szechwan Province, a territory largely inhabited by Tibetan tribes, refers to a mountain in that country "wherein they find a kind of stone called turquois, in great abundance, and it is a very beautiful stone; these the emperor does not allow to be extracted without his special order." For more information on the history of turquois in India, Tibet, and China the reader may be referred to Laufer's "Notes on Turquois in the East" (Field Museum Publication 169) and "Sino-Iranica" (pp. 516-520).

Lapis lazuli is mined in several localities of eastern Tibet and together with rubies was included by the ancient kings of Tibet among the presents sent to the sovereigns of China. The principal supply of the finest kind of lapis, however, comes from the mountains of Badakshan, north of the Hindu Kush, which produces two precious stones—lapis and the balas ruby or spinel. From this source the ancient Persians and Assyrians derived their lapis, and during the Tang dynasty (A. D. 618-906) it was exported from there to China. Marco Polo visited the mines, calling the stone *azure* and saying that it is the finest in the world and is obtained in a vein like silver. This exportation to China has persisted through the middle ages down to the present time. Lapis lazuli is called in Chinese "essence of gold" (*kin tsing*) or "dark-blue gold stone" (*ts'ing kin shi*), and was chiefly enlisted for inlaying, occasionally also for jewelry and carving of figurines and snuff-bottles. The emperor used to wear a rosary of lapis beads when performing worship on the altar of Heaven, and a

rosary of turquoise beads when officiating in the temple of the Moon.

It is difficult to outline briefly a history of gold in China. One point must be emphasized, and this will always speak in favor of the Chinese, that they were never obsessed by the hunger and greed for gold (the *auri sacra fames*, "the accursed hunger for gold," of the Roman poet), which characterizes the Semites, Greeks, Romans, and all other European nations ancient and modern. Gold was never coined into money in China, gold was not amassed and hoarded just for the love of it and, although found in many parts of the country, was never intensely or systematically exploited. We never hear in China of a "gold rush" or "gold fever," symptoms so characteristic of Europe and America. There is good evidence for believing that the oldest metal known to the ancient Chinese was silver, then copper, and lastly gold. Among the relics of the Shang dynasty, as far as I know, gold or objects of gold have not yet been traced, and probably were still unknown.

It seems that only in the late Chou period (about 300 B. C.) did gold come into prominence when gold foil was applied to bronze vessels as a coating or was used as an inlay in the surface of ritual bronzes. Gold was then considered as the most precious metal which also was the object of barter, and among precious substances was considered as ranking next to jade. Its chief use was for magico-religious purposes in that it was interred with the dead, the belief being entertained that gold, in the same manner as jade, was capable of preventing the body from decay, preserving it, and promoting the resurrection and immortality of the individual.

It is an interesting fact that there is no genuine word for gold in the Chinese language; there is only the descriptive term "yellow metal" (*huang kin*), on the same level as "white metal" which describes silver or tin, "red metal" referring to copper, and "black metal" to iron. In course of time, the general designation *kin*

("metal") was reserved for gold, but the occurrence of this word in ancient texts presents a stumbling-block, as it is by no means certain in each and every case whether it refers to metals in general, or to gold, or to another specific metal, and there is no consensus of opinion among the ancient commentators.

Under the Han (206 B. C.-A. D. 220) the production of gold increased considerably. The philosopher Wang Chung writes that "gold and jade are considered the choicest omens; the sound of gold and the color of jade are most appreciated by man; gold is produced in the earth, and the color of the earth is yellow; the ruling element of the Han dynasty is earth, which accounts for the production of gold." Gilded bronze vases and vessels with gold incrustations belong to the finest achievements of Han art. Jade was still extensively used for personal ornaments, and for this purpose was more favorite with the people than gold.

Under the Six Dynasties gold and silver were lavishly employed for Buddhist statues and statuettes and for animal figurines, also for bowls, dishes, and boxes. We stand on firmer ground in coming to the Tang dynasty, whose productions are clearly recognizable. During that memorable epoch the Chinese began to appreciate the qualities of gold for artistic purposes. It is amazing that the art of the goldsmith was then fully developed and had apparently reached its climax: all manners of technique in treating gold were known and practiced in the glorious age of the Tang, such as beating out and cutting gold foil, gold filigree, repoussé work, work à jour, beading, making fine gold threads and gold wire and twisting it into spirals, and a marvelous combination of various processes into one harmonious work of art. The succeeding dynasties have adopted the technical lessons of the Tang without adding much that is new.

While many fine gold ornaments and even gold crowns of the Tang, Sung and later dynasties have come out of China during the last decade or so, nothing like the gold treasure of the Emperor Chien Lung has ever appeared before. This set, both from a

technical and artistic viewpoint, is absolutely unique in the world and the most perfect achievement of the goldsmith's craft that has ever been attained anywhere by human hands. The gold objects found in Tutankhamen's tomb are dwarfed and eclipsed by this production of a master mind, which baffles description. It is useless to attempt to describe the processes of its workmanship, which is so microscopically fine and so fairy-like delicate that its proper appreciation is only possible when studied under a powerful magnifying lens. We can but admire the enchanting color harmony of the gold with the charming blues of turquoise and lapis lazuli, the simplicity and purity of style, and the exquisite choice of decorative elements.

Let us not be oblivious to the fact that period means but little in the history of art. A work of art is not necessarily great or good because it is old, and not necessarily inferior or poor because it is more or less recent. It is artistic merit and quality and the spirit pervading a work of art which is the decisive factor. Some scholars regard the Chinese art of the eighteenth century as one of a purely retrospective and imitative character and one of mere technical perfection. This sweeping generalization is not correct, however. True it is that ancient forms and designs were then perpetuated and reproduced, but not slavishly; it was, in the main, a new spirit cast into ancient molds, a new soul breathed into the bodies of the past, which rose again to a better and bigger life. In all lines of artistic endeavor we recognize a great amount of progress, improved taste, and novel ideas — in porcelain, textiles, embroidery, lacquer ware, jewelry, bronzes, sculpture, and painting. In many cases the artists of the Chien Lung period were more original than the originals taken by them as models, in the same manner as Shakespeare was more original and greater than the writers from whom he derived the plots for his dramas. Confucius, China's great sage, said, "Everything has its beauty, but not every one sees it." There are Chien Lung bronzes more artistic and therefore more desirable than many Han, Tang,



and Sung bronzes; and there are painters of the same period endowed with a striking originality of mind and power of brush. In fact, the reign of Chien Lung signals China's golden age in art and literature, a great epoch of renaissance, and the craft of the goldsmith must then have reached the climax of perfection, as witnessed by the exhibition of these superlative examples.

There is another important point to which attention must be drawn. While each piece individually merits careful study and analysis and must elicit our admiration for its beauty of form and mastery of execution, the whole set must also be viewed synthetically and examined as a unit in its totality. As every one will readily recognize, it was conceived by a single artist according to a well-devised and premeditated plan. It is this unity of plan and thought that lends another attractive charm to this group of desk paraphernalia. The set was first designed by the hand of a guiding genius who was endowed with a vision, a profound artistic sense, a refined taste, and a keen appreciation of the beauty of line and form. His was the mind of a master; assuredly he was the leader of his art during his days, another Benvenuto Cellini. His name unfortunately is unknown. In my essay "East and West" (*The Open Court*, December, 1933) I have set forth the reasons which prompted Chinese artists not to sign their masterpieces. They were too modest and too sensible to mar their productions with their signatures, and did not flatter themselves into the belief that they personally were the creators of their creations, but humbly attributed them to the action of a higher power, to the merits of their ancestors or to the will of Heaven. The artist was a sort of high priest; he produced, not to please his contemporaries, but to honor his ancestors and to attain his own salvation.

The artist, who designed this group of gold objects, did not work for the acclaim of the multitude or with a view to an exhibition and obtaining a *grand prix*. He had a finer and nobler ambition; his chief inspiration was the thought that his work was to be seen and judged by just one man — the Son of Heaven. All

his efforts were bent on this one objective. We may well realize how many years he must have toiled over his plans and designs in his study, how many sleepless nights he must have spent over them, how many years he must have anxiously watched his staff of artisans who were entrusted with the task of bringing his ideas to life. The result of his painstaking labors which without exaggeration we may estimate at ten years or even more is now happily before our eyes; surely it was worthy of the name of the great emperor. We can read from the superhuman efforts expended on the workmanship that the men who devoted to it their time and energy constantly had the thought of the Son of Heaven on their minds and were actuated by the earnest desire of service and loyalty to his majesty—loyalty, the cardinal virtue of a good citizen inculcated by Confucius.

On the other hand, solely a character and personality of the greatness of Chien Lung was capable of inspiring a masterpiece like this one. In other words, it has two focuses of radiation; on the one hand, the human, altruistic, and wonderfully devoted spirit of the artist and his staff; on the other hand, the high-minded, art-loving, and generous spirit of the sovereign. There is, accordingly, a symphonic unit pervading this set of eighteen pieces. Each object has its definite place and significance, and bears a relation to every other object. It may not be an exaggeration to name this treasure a glorious symphony in gold, a triumph of the spirit over matter.

A word should be said as to why Pao Tai presented his lord with a series of objects just to adorn his writing desk. Here we have to remember that writing in China is calligraphy, an art on the same par as drawing and painting and the first and essential prerequisite and characteristic of a scholar. The written word was always worshiped as a fetish, and any materials and utensils devoted to the art of writing were given the most careful attention on the part of scholars. The celebrated calligrapher Wang Hi-chi (A. D. 321-379), whose handwriting is said to have been

"light as floating clouds and vigorous as a startled dragon," is credited with the dictum, "Paper symbolizes the troops arrayed for battle; the writing-brush, sword and shield; ink represents the soldier's armor; the ink-stone, a city's wall and moat, while the sentiments of the heart symbolize the chief commander." In this saying the mental attitude of the Chinese toward the arsenal of the learned is perfectly crystalized; paper, brush, ink, and ink-slab are the four great emblems of scholarship and culture; all of these are inventions which the Chinese may justly claim as their own, which constitute fundamentals of their civilization, and which have largely contributed to make them a nation of studious, well-bred and cultured men.

Chinese paper, brushes, and ink are the best ever made, and have achieved a world-wide reputation. Chinese ink is the only true black ink ever produced and that will last permanently. The presentation to the Son of Heaven of magnificent paraphernalia for his desk was a tribute to his standing and reputation as a scholar, a homage to his literary achievements. And a scholar and poet he was, and a very gifted and distinguished one. His collected essays and poems written in Chinese and Manchu fill several hundred volumes. One of these, a eulogy of Mukden and its environment, was translated into French by the Jesuit Father Amiot (published in Paris, 1770) and excited the admiration of Voltaire, who addressed an appreciative ode to the emperor. We may imagine that this gold set was capable of firing his imagination and inspiring him to many a composition.

He was a lover of books and literature and gathered in his palace the greatest library ever assembled. The catalogue of this library is the fundamental source for our knowledge of the history of Chinese literature. The works edited by him or issued under his direction and patronage are legion, and many of these belong to the masterpieces of typography of all times.

He was a liberal patron of art and artists. Although he disliked the Jesuit missionaries and forbade the propagation of the Christian religion, he appreciated their erudition and retained two Catholic artists, Castiglione, an Italian, and Attiret, a Frenchman, in his service.

His personal name was Hung Li. Chien Lung, the name by which we are accustomed to call him, was not his real name, but the slogan which he adopted for the period of his reign. Thus, the year 1736, in which he ascended the throne, in Chinese reckoning, is the first year of the period Chien Lung. He was the fourth son of the Emperor Yung Cheng (1723-35) and grandson of the great Emperor Kang Hi (1662-1722). Born in 1710, he was twenty-five years old when he succeeded his father, and soon rivaled his grandfather's fame as a ruler and a patron of letters. Gifted with an insatiable thirst for knowledge and a conspicuous talent for administration and statesmanship, he was an indefatigable worker until his last days. The year 1793 is memorable for the fact that the Earl of Macartney as ambassador of the King of Great Britain was received in two official audiences by the Emperor in the gardens of the palace of Jehol. On completing a cycle of sixty years of power and a successful reign, he abdicated in the year 1795 in favor of one of his sons (he had seventeen altogether), spending his last years in seclusion and study. The empire then was at peace, and the people were enjoying prosperity. He died in 1799 at the age of eighty-nine—the last great emperor of China and certainly one of the greatest who ever graced the dragon throne. He was canonized with the title Kao Tsung Shun Huang-ti.

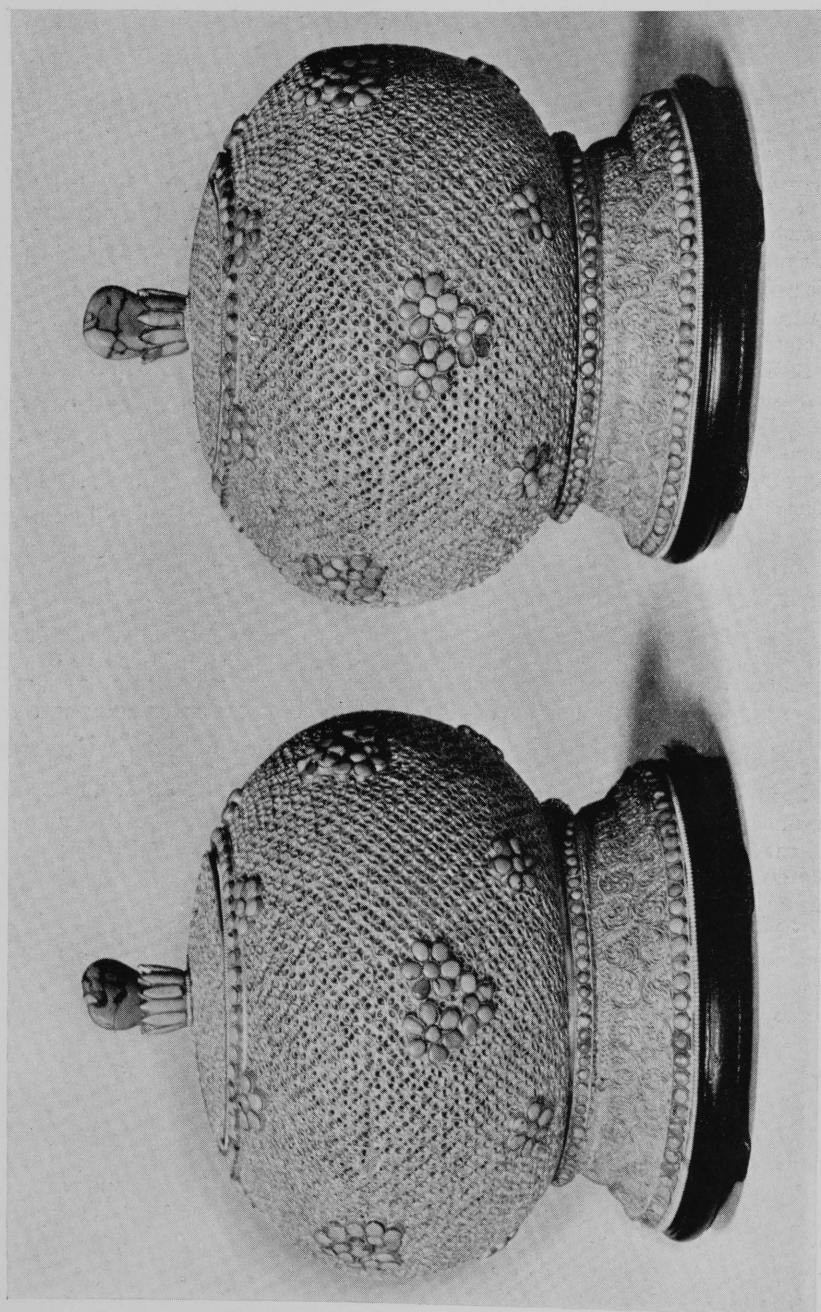
A word remains to be said in regard to the manner in which this gold treasure found its way to America. It remained in the possession of the imperial house during the nineteenth century. In 1900 when the Boxer uprising lured the armies of Europe to Peking, the Empress Dowager and the court took refuge in the ancient capital of China, Si-an fu, and lived there in exile for some



time. According to a statement made by a member of the retinue, the gold set in question was regarded as of sufficient importance and value to be taken along with other treasures on this flight. Afterwards it was brought back to the palace of Peking, and in 1908 Prince Pu Yi, who now reigns as Emperor Kang Te over Manchukuo, fell heir to it. When the Republican Government withdrew its annuity from the young prince, he gradually became impoverished and was compelled to solicit loans from Chinese banks of Peking and Tientsin, placing with them numerous art treasures, among these the gold set, as collaterals. Unfortunately he was unable to meet his obligations though several extensions on the loans were granted. Finally the banks were forced to foreclose and to dispose of the art treasures to collectors. The gold set was the first to be segregated from the other collections which included bronzes, jades, and court paraphernalia, and was sent to the United States. It is now in charge of the well-known art firm, Parish-Watson & Company of New York, which has placed it on exhibition in Chicago's Century of Progress. All art lovers will be grateful to Parish-Watson & Company for the opportunity of viewing this unique gold treasure, which is like the embodiment of all beauty and splendor of the Arabian Nights.

BERTHOLD LAUFER

Chicago, June the first, 1934



## DESCRIPTIVE CATALOG

### 1-2

A pair of censers of spherical shape, of solid gold wrought in open work, filigree, and beadwork. The surfaces are decorated with parallel rows of quatrefoils à jour, laid around in circles and overlaid with clusters of plum blossoms formed by turquoises. These are scattered around freely and inobtrusively as though a sudden blast of wind had shaken them off a tree. Like sketches of bamboo, the drawing of plum blossoms has developed into a special branch of Chinese art and with some artists into a veritable passion. The covers, in harmony with the shape of the vessels, are surmounted by finials formed by a knob of turquois, and these are enclosed by petals of turquois mounted on gold; the knobs function as handles. Either censer is equipped with a gold stand bordered by rows of turquoises which enclose a most graceful and beautiful palmette or palm-leaf design. The surfaces of these stands are embossed with an ornamental form of the character *shou* ("long life") surrounded by five bats. The bat (*fu*), by means of punning, is an emblem of happiness (*fu*), and the group of five bats symbolizes the five blessings—old age, wealth, health, love of virtue, and an easy natural death.

Height: 5 inches. Weight: 355 and 365 grams, respectively.

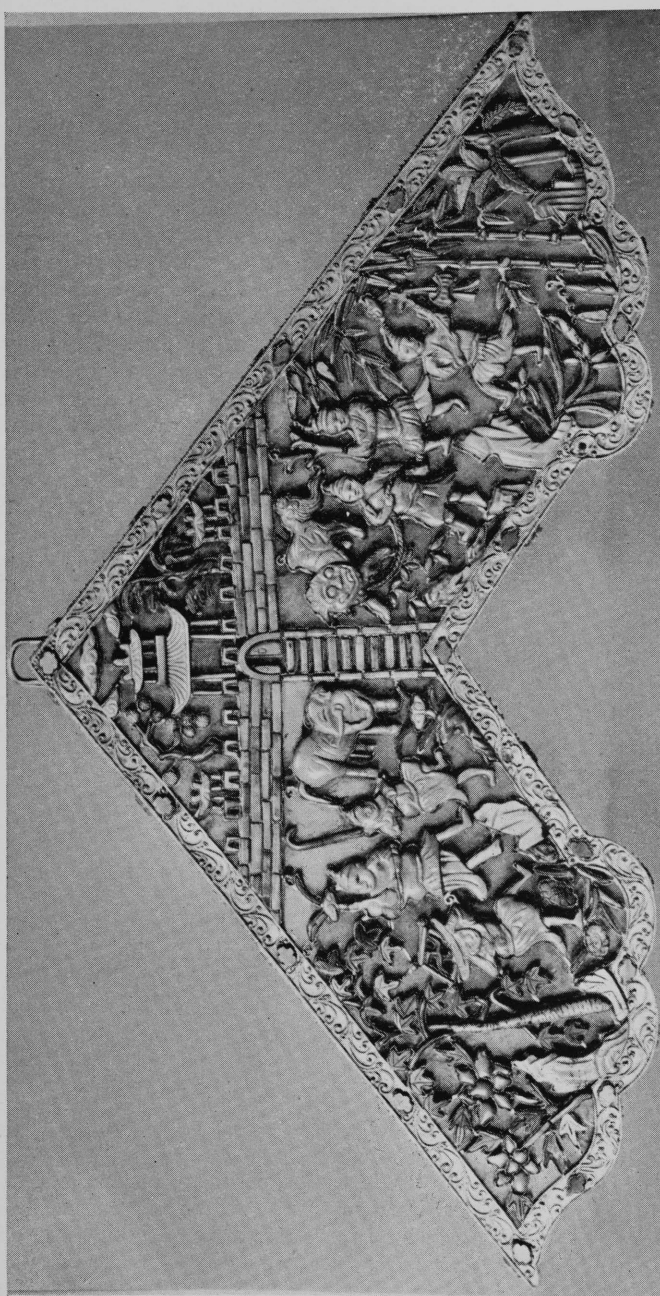
### 3

An arm-rest or wrist-support of gold, the designs being brought out in turquois. They represent cracked ice over a pond upon which the first plum blossoms of the spring have fallen, alluding to the awakening of the spring. The veins in the petals are delicately carved. This pattern reminds one of the famed motive of Chinese pictorial art—the poet astride a donkey in a snow-laden landscape searching for the first plum blossoms. The edges of the support are adorned with key patterns in lapis lazuli and turquois alternating. The ordinary supports of this kind were made of bamboo lacquered and carved, or of ivory; they were fashionable in the eighteenth century, but are no longer in use. They served as support for the wrist while writing with the brush. Specimens of such bamboo supports may be seen in a case devoted to Chinese writing materials in Field Museum (in center of West Gallery), where all sorts of writing-brushes, inks, ink-stones, brush-holders, and other utensils are also assembled. He who will study this material will obtain a clearer idea of the meaning and scope of this desk set.

Length: 4 inches. Width:  $2 \frac{3}{16}$  inches. Weight: 145 grams.

### 4

A desk ornament of rock-crystal, in the shape of an ancient jade chime, mounted on gold and studded with turquoises. All figures and designs are skilfully carved from turquois in high relief and alike on both sides. They are carefully matched and registered on the foundation of rock-crystal. The picture illustrates a subject celebrated in Chinese painting: representatives





of foreign nations bringing gifts and tribute to the imperial court. The tribute-bearers are congregated in front of a crenelated city wall to which a staircase leads up. The top of the wall is crowned by a two-storied pavilion overshadowed by trees and overtopped by clouds. Two smaller pavilions are on the sides. Near the staircase are an elephant and a lion. The lion is chained and guided by a man from Central Asia, well characterized, like the other men, by his pointed conical cap. Live trained lions were frequently sent to Chinese sovereigns as gifts by the kings of Persia and Central Asia, the first lion tribute being recorded in A. D. 87 under the Han. Lions are not natives of China, and were always a source of wonder to the Chinese; in art, of course, the king of beasts is a familiar figure. When made in bronze, the tribute-bearers are usually astride the lion and the elephant. The mahout who guides the elephant is equipped with a hooked stick. At his feet there is a *ling-chi*, a fungus of immortality and symbol of long life, and a tribute-bearer carries such a fungus in a vase, while another on the opposite side carries coral branches, a very favorite tribute gift, and another holds an ingot of silver. Bamboo trunks, banana plants, a Wu-tung tree, and rocks complement the picture.

In the Jade Room of Field Museum chimes of rock-crystal and jade are on view. Their shape is derived from a carpenter's square. At an early date the ancient Chinese recognized the sonorous qualities of jade and used it as a musical instrument, suspending it in a wooden frame by means of a silk cord passing through a perforation at the apex. It was still so employed under the Manchu dynasty during the ceremonies performed in honor of Confucius. In the Chien Lung period, resonant stones were much favored as birthday presents or congratulatory gifts, as their name *ch'ing* is punned upon another word *ch'ing* of the same sound and tone, which means "good luck, happiness, blessings, felicitations." Formerly they were also part of a bride's dowry in Peking, and served as ornaments in the parlors of high officials.

Length:  $9\frac{1}{2}$  inches. Weight: 636 grams.

5

A desk ornament, of gold, in the shape of an ancient jade chime, being the mate to No. 4, but different in style and technique. It is entirely wrought from gold, while fruits, foliage, rock, and bats are carved from turquoise against a delicate ground of gold filigree. The patterns are identical on both sides. The fruit is the peach, and it is the renowned peach of immortality growing in Paradise, believed to be located in the west, and conferring immortality on him who eats it. It is a symbol of longevity, also an emblem of marriage. The five bats, symbolizing again five blessings as in Nos. 1-2, are artistically scattered, one at the apex, two at the base and one each at the ends where the peaches terminate. Two rows of sea waves, of turquoise, are represented at the two bases, jewels appearing on the crest of the waves and two rows of genuine pearls above them. It was believed that the Dragon King dwelling in a palace on the bottom of the ocean was the owner and dispenser of pearls and precious jewels. The de-



signs are therefore expressive of the following wish: "Felicitations! May you partake of the five blessings, may you obtain the peach of immortality and all treasures hidden in the sea!" The object is bordered by cloud patterns carved from turquoise.

Length:  $9\frac{1}{2}$  inches. Weight: 360 grams.

## 6-7

Two paper-weights of gold, rectangular in shape. No. 6 rests on a solid gold plaque on which bats and clouds are engraved alternately (altogether six bats and seven clouds). On the upper surface, the center is occupied by an ornamental form of the character *shou* ("long life") carved from turquoise; three bats and clouds alternating are to the left and right. The two sides are each decorated with five bats. The wish expressed by these designs is: "May longevity be yours, and may the clouds or the sky be the limit of your happiness!"

The other paper-weight, No. 7, rests on a gold plaque engraved with sprays of peonies and tendrils, and has a very unusual beaded design of geometrical character bordered by two bands of delicate key patterns. This gold filigree ground is overlaid by larger key patterns or meanders carved from turquoise in relief. With the application of this pattern Pao Tai intends to thank his majesty for favors received; for the meander has been from ancient times a symbol of thunder and clouds which send fertilizing rain and produce affluence and wealth to the farmer. The meander was called "thunder pattern" or "rain-cloud pattern." Rain was conceived as a favor conferred by Heaven or the Dragon on mankind. For this reason the meander was applied to objects in allusion to the acknowledgment of favors received. Moreover, there is a rebus involved. The meander was also styled *hui wen*, i. e. returning or revolving pattern, and *hui* means also "to respond, to return a favor." Pao Tai therefore intends to express the message, "Thanks to the imperial dragon for favors showered upon me in the past!"

The center of the upper surface is occupied by the character *hi* of ancient seal form, which signifies "joy."

No. 6. Length:  $9\frac{1}{4}$  inches. Weight: 270 grams.

No. 7. Length:  $9\frac{3}{16}$  inches. Weight: 285 grams.

## 8

A scepter of happy augury or good luck, called *Ju-i*, which means "as you desire, according to your wish." On the occasion of a birthday or New Year, such scepters were bestowed by the emperor upon high dignitaries and courtiers and by these on the sovereign, with the idea of expressing good wishes. Queen Victoria received one from the emperor of China in honor of the fiftieth anniversary of her reign. Such scepters were made of jade, sandalwood, bamboo, amber, and even iron inlaid with gold and silver wire, but I have never before seen one of gold. The broad plaque atop is adorned with peaches and foliage, the peach of immortality and symbol of long life, and two bats carved from turquoise and encircling a beautiful turquoise



plaque with beaded mounting. The designs on the handle, likewise carved from turquoise, represent the eight symbols of happy augury or eight precious objects, adopted by the Chinese from Buddhism and frequently represented on porcelains, in tapestries and embroideries. From top to bottom they run as follows: the wheel, an ancient emblem of the kings of India whose war chariots rolled over the universe, and of Buddha, who turned the wheel of religion; the conch, which was blown in announcing victory and calling the pious to prayer; the state umbrella, an emblem of royalty; a canopy, likewise so; lotus, emblem of purity; a holy-water vase, symbolizing abundance and peace; the double fish; and sacred knot, originally a mystic emblem on the chest of Vishnu, in China emblem of luck. The reverse is covered with an exquisite all-over pattern of gold filigree, while bands of meander decorate the sides.

These scepters have had a very curious development. Originally made of iron, they were a kind of blunt sword for self-defence or a symbol of command in the hands of a general. Buddhistic notions of magic were subsequently transferred to this weapon, and it was considered a magical wand capable of transforming the body, securing victory in battle, and enabling one to attain every wish. As a symbol of conquering power it was frequently placed in the hands of Bodhisatva statues.

Length:  $9\frac{1}{2}$  inches. Weight: 210 grams.

## 9

A box designated in Chinese on the accompanying label as a "circular twin box." Such "twin boxes" were commonly made in lacquer, and twin vases in porcelain and jade also are known. This twin box is wrought from pure gold in open work, the unit of design being a quatrefoil. This background is overlaid both on the cover and the sides with elegant plum blossoms carved from turquoise, some single, others in pairs and clusters of three—a highly artistic principle. The concentric zones on the cover are filled with cloud patterns of turquoise. The surfaces of the cover form two interlaced circles, twins grown together as it were.

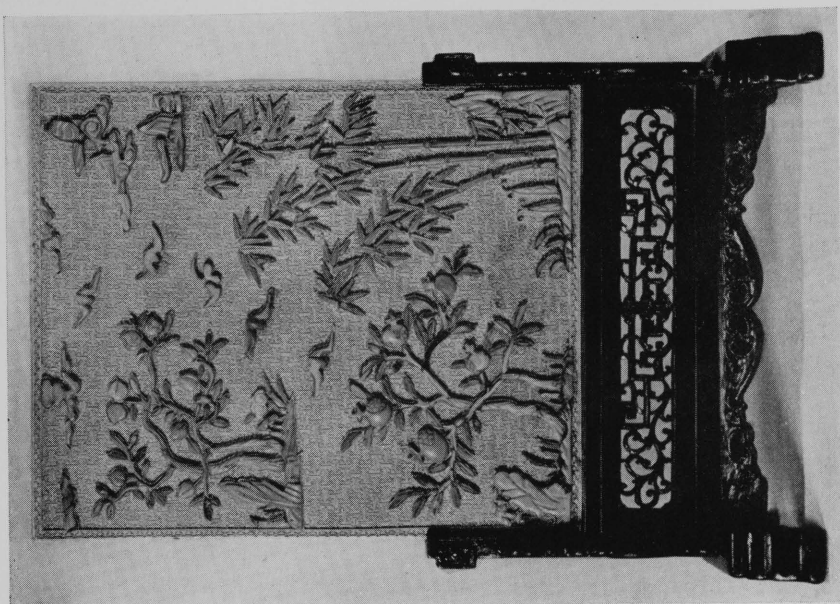
Length:  $4\frac{5}{16}$  inches. Height:  $1\frac{1}{2}$  inches. Weight: 195 grams.

## 10

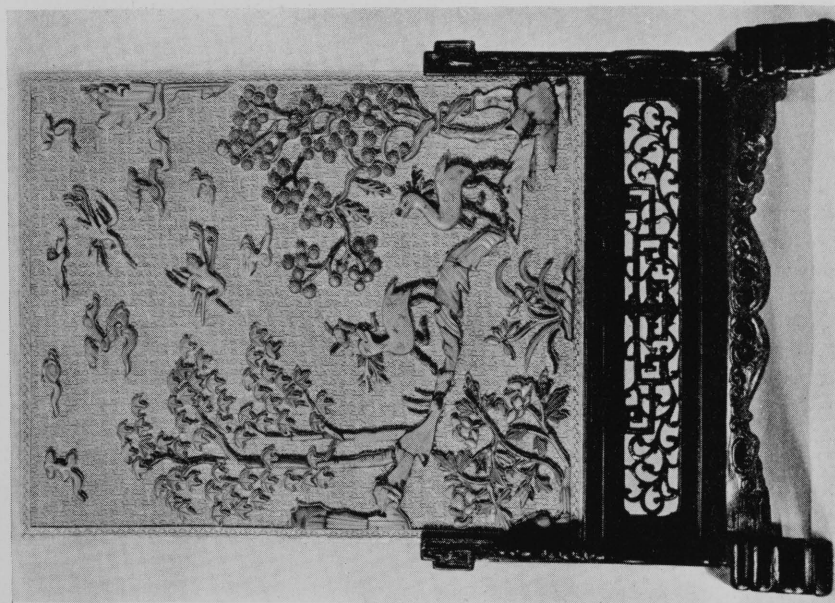
A censer of compressed globular shape, of gold in open work, except the base which is solid, adorned with turquoise and lapis lazuli. The central register of the vessel contains the eight Buddhistic symbols of happy augury, described under No. 8, carved from lapis lazuli of exquisite color. The eight symbols are separated by sprays of chrysanthemums, the petals being represented in turquoise. Above and below this central register there is a band of quatrefoils of turquoise alternating with lapis lazuli. The edge and the base are decorated with a design derived from lotus petals. The base is finished with a circle of turquoise beads. The cover is crowned by a perforated knob of turquoise mounted on petals of gold, and is laid out in three concentric zones. One of these is also occupied by the eight symbols in lapis lazuli.

Height:  $2\frac{3}{4}$  inches. Weight: 280 grams.





13B



13A

## 11

An ink bed, of fine old turquoise in the matrix, mounted on gold filigree of great delicacy and refinement. The turquoise rests on a solid gold plaque the lower side of which is embossed with sprays of peonies and foliage of elegant style. The bed is posed on four feet of animalized style, dragon masks of archaistic style being brought out in high relief. A cake of ink was placed on top. Ink-cakes are gotten up in a very artistic manner, landscapes and portraits being stamped on their surfaces from molds, or designs being painted on them in gold and silver. The Chinese term used on the white silk label means literally "ink bed"; the Tibetan term means "a stand or support for ink."

Length: 4 inches. Width:  $3\frac{1}{2}$  inches. Height  $1\frac{1}{2}$  inches. Weight: 220 grams.

## 12

A dish or plate on a separate stand, a reverie somewhat reminiscent of the mysteries surrounding the Holy Grail. The gold filigree of the plate is overlaid with chrysanthemum blossoms carved in turquoise, both inside and outside. The six feet of the stand are carved in the shape of elephant trunks, a tradition inherited from archaic bronze vessels of the Shang and Chou periods, and are surmounted by ogre heads of archaistic style, exquisitely cut from lapis lazuli of excellent quality and color. The surface of the stand is decorated with a key pattern or meander band in gold. A circle of turquoise beads is laid around the edge of the stand and around the ring forming the base. This is a masterpiece, the climax of refined taste, a personification of pure beauty, combined with the highest possible qualities of technical perfection.

Diameter of bowl:  $6\frac{5}{16}$  inches. Diameter of stand:  $5\frac{1}{2}$  inches. Total height:  $2\frac{1}{2}$  inches. Total weight: 435 grams.

## 13

Desk screen of gold, placed in a teakwood stand, with pictorial representations carved from turquoise on both sides, which speak an eloquent symbolic language. In the upper part we see cranes on the wing soaring in clouds—emblematic of reaching immortality. Next to the phoenix, the crane is the most celebrated bird in Chinese legend. It is reputed as the patriarch of the feathered tribe and as the airship carrying heavenward the saints who have attained salvation. In fact, the crane itself is regarded as the incarnation of an immortal fairy. Cranes at sunset, e. g., depict their flight over the sea to the Fortunate Isles of the Blest. The crane is believed to reach a fabulous age; when six hundred years old, it drinks, but is no longer in need of taking food. As on our screen the cranes fly from heaven downward to earth, they are intended to confer immortality on the Son of Heaven, the recipient of the screen. On the left, a large Wu-tung tree (*Sterculia platanifolia*), one of the most beautiful trees of China, planted in many temples and parks, and sacred to the phoenix. The pine to the right is a symbol of strength, endurance, and permanence. The two deer



are of the spotted variety, called *mei hua lu* ("plum-blossom deer") or *kin ts'ien lu* ("gold coin deer"). The stag or deer, by means of punning, symbolizes prosperity or a good income. One of the deer holds a *ling-chi*, the fungus of immortality, alluding to long life, and deer is likewise believed to be a long-living creature.

The opposite side of the screen shows the five bats as the emblem of five blessings (explained in Nos. 1-2), coming down from the clouds. To the left, the peach tree of Paradise (see No. 5), at its foot a fungus of immortality. Beneath, a pomegranate tree and three tall bamboo stalks. The pomegranate fruits are ripe, displaying their seeds. Because of their exuberant seeds they are regarded as emblems alluding to numerous progeny. The pomegranate, so to speak, is an anti-race-suicide symbol. The fruit is still a favorite marriage gift and appears in the wedding feast, implying the wish for many sons and grandsons. The motives displayed on this side of the screen present a rebus which can be read. *Chu*, the bamboo, stands in the rebus for another word *chu*, which means "to pray." Thus, the donor intended to express to his majesty this wish: "I pray that you may obtain the five blessings, that you may be reborn in Paradise and eat the peach of immortality, and that you may leave numerous progeny behind!"

6¼ x 5¼ inches. Weight: 480 grams.

#### 14

A quadrangular vase, of gold, in the shape of the archaic jade image of the deity Earth. Heaven was conceived by the ancient Chinese as circular, and earth as flat and square outside and rounded in the interior. The religion of the ancient Chinese was mainly nature worship; the great cosmic powers, Heaven and Earth and the Four Quarters, were the principal deities to whom worship was paid. Their philosophy was dualistic and classified all phenomena as male and female, light and darkness, heat and cold, positive and negative. These two primeval forces were seen active in Heaven and Earth; the union of the two and their constant interaction were believed to have resulted in the creation of nature and man. The deity Earth was represented in the form of a jade tube rectangular in cross section and round inside. Yellow was the color of Earth, and yellow jade whenever possible was chosen for this emblem. It therefore was a felicitous idea to select this emblem for a vessel in gold. The gold filigree background of the four panels is overlaid by turquoise carvings in high relief, which represent the flowers of the four seasons. In one of the panels is displayed a flowering plum tree on which a magpie is perching. The magpie is a bird of good omen and was regarded as the protector of the Manchu dynasty. Another panel shows two dragon-flies, a banana, and orchid leaves growing from under a rock. The base is decorated with two meander bands in gold.

In this case it is especially true, as has been pointed out in the Introduction, that artists of the Chien Lung Period often surpassed the originals which served them as models and revived them with a new soul.

Height: 6 inches. Weight: 435 grams.

## 15

Water-receptacle, of gold, for the desk, consisting of vessel, cover, ladle, and stand, to contain the water which had to be poured on the ink-stone when a cake of ink was to be rubbed against the stone. The Chinese prepare only as much ink as is necessary at a time, since the liquid ink rapidly dries up. The ladle, used for pouring the water on the ink-stone, has the shape of a Ju-i scepter (see No. 8) gracefully curved, and is studded with turquoises. The shape of the vessel is exceedingly graceful and refined. The pattern—plum blossoms spread over cracked ice, of turquoise—is identical with that in No. 3. Lapis lazuli is listed for the bands laid around the mouth and foot of the vessel and the stand.

Height: 3 inches. Weight: 200 grams.

## 16

Hexagonal gold vase, intended as a flower vase, of exquisite shape, such as we see in the finest examples of porcelains. Key patterns are laid around the mouth, middle, and base of the vase. The foot is adorned with a continuous swastika pattern, an emblem of good luck. The six upper panels are decorated with tendrils, emanating from a flower in the center. The six lower panels are ornamented with floral sprays, all carved from turquoise. The vase consists of solid gold plaques which are overlaid with filigree patterns. Height: 7 inches. Weight: 290 grams.

## 17 (Frontispiece)

Flower vase of gold, with gold stand, called by the Chinese a hammer-shaped vase, in imitation of a porcelain vase which was a great favorite in the Kang Hi and Chien Lung eras. The delicate gold filigree background is overlaid with chrysanthemum blossoms of sky-blue turquoise, artistically arranged single and in groups of two and three. The vase is posed on a stand of gold filigree, the circular top of solid gold being embossed with arabesques. The stand is adorned with monster heads of lapis lazuli; each head has two protruding fangs and arms equipped with four claws. This motive is well known in Tibetan art.

This subject presents a rebus which can be read and which is expressive of a wish. The word for the vase, *p'ing*, is punned on another word *p'ing*, which means "peace." A name for the chrysanthemum is *chiu hua*, "nine flower," because it blooms in the ninth month; *chiu*, "nine," is punned with *chiu*, "long." Therefore the wish is expressed, "May you enjoy peace for a long time!" Height: 8¼ inches. Weight: 450 grams.

## 18

Writing-brush holder, of gold, decorated with the same pattern—plum blossoms spread over cracked ice, of turquoise—as in Nos. 3 and 15, an allusion to the early awakening of the spring. The veins in the petals of the blossoms are finely carved. The edge and the base of the vessel are decorated with a band of plain geometrical patterns carved from lapis lazuli of a clear blue. Height: 4 9/16 inches. Weight: 355 grams.







